

Message Text

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TO AMEMBASSY BEIRUT IMMEDIATE

S E C R E T STATE 225449

EXDIS HANDLE AS NODIS

FOL TEL SENT ACTION DAMASCUS FROM SECSTATE DTD 12 SEPT 1976 QTE

S E C R E T STATE 225449

NODIS
FOR AMBASSADOR MURPHY FROM THE SECRETARY

E.O. 11652: GDS

TAGS: PFOR, LE, SY, US

SUBJECT: LEBANESE DEVELOPMENTS

1. YOU SHOULD TRY TO SEE ASAD AS SOON AS POSSIBLE TO SHARE WITH HIM THE IMPRESSIONS WE GAINED OF THE CHRISTIAN POSITION IN LEBANON THROUGH THE RECENT VISIT TO CHRISTIAN-CONTROLLED LEBANON BY HOUGHTON AND MACK. AT THE SAME TIME, YOU SHOULD TRY TO ASCERTAIN SYRIAN INTENTIONS IN THE PERIOD IMMEDIATELY AHEAD AND EXPLAIN THAT WE WOULD WELCOME HIS SUGGESTIONS AS TO HOW WE MIGHT BEST SUPPORT SARKIS IN MOVES TOWARDS A SETTLEMENT.
2. AS REGARDS THE HOUGHTON/MACK VISIT, YOU MAY DRAW ON THE SECRET

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FOLLOWING POINTS:

-- THE CHRISTIAN LEADERSHIP IS GENERALLY CONFIDENT, AND SHOWED LITTLE CONCERN ABOUT THEIR CAPACITIES TO DEFEND THE

CHRISTIAN COMMUNITY. THEIR OVERWHELMING PREOCCUPATION, HOWEVER, IS THE PRESENT AND FUTURE ROLE OF THE PALESTINIANS RESIDING IN LEBANON. THE CHRISTIANS REMAIN UNWILLING TO RETURN TO THE STATUS QUO ANTE AS REGARDS THE PALESTINIAN ROLE IN THE LEBANESE STATE; THEY ARE OPPOSED TO LEAVING THE PALESTINIANS IN A POSITION TO RETAIN THE STATE-WITHIN-A-STATE STATUS OF THE PRE-WAR PERIOD OR TO PLAY A MAJOR ROLE

IN INTERNAL LEBANESE POLITICAL PROCESSES.

--SOME, SUCH AS CHAMOUN, WANT SOMETHING MUCH MORE RESTRICTIVE THAN THE CAIRO ACCORDS; CHAMOUN HIMSELF TALKS ABOUT SENDING OUT OF LEBANON ALL PALESTINIANS WHO CAME TO LEBANON AFTER 1969. SARKIS IS NOT NEARLY AS RIGID, BUT ALSO MENTIONED THE NEED FOR A TRANSITIONAL SOLUTION TO THE PALESTINIAN PROBLEM IN LEBANON, WHILE WAITING FOR THE ULTIMATE SOLUTION WHICH WOULD BE REACHED WITHIN THE CONTEXT OF A GENERAL MIDDLE EAST SETTLEMENT.

-- THE CHRISTIANS HAVE NOT MADE CLEAR HOW THEY INTEND TO ACHIEVE THEIR OBJECTIVE. THE PHALANGE AND SARKIS SEEM TO BE THE LEADING PROPONENTS OF AN EARLY CEASEFIRE WHICH WOULD ENABLE PEACE SETTLEMENT EFFORTS TO BE CONDUCTED IN A MORE PROPITIOUS ATMOSPHERE. THE PHALANGE IN PARTICULAR TELLS US IT INTENDS TO CONTINUE ITS EFFORTS TO PROBE THE PALESTINIANS FOR AT LEAST A LIMITED UNDERSTANDING. EVEN FOR THE PHALANGE, HOWEVER, PALESTINIAN WITHDRAWAL FROM THE METN SEEMS TO BE AN IRREDUCIBLE MINIMAL CONCESSION. EVEN THE CHRISTIANS THAT WANT A CEASEFIRE NOW ARE CONCERNED THAT THE EXTREMISTS AMONG THE PALESTINIANS WILL ULTIMATELY REJECT ANY UNDERSTANDING DEVELOPED WITH THE CHRISTIANS.

-- THE CHRISTIAN LEADERS GENERALLY FAVOR A RESOLUTION OF THE LEBANESE-PALESTINIAN ASPECT OF THE CONFLICT PRIOR TO A RECONCILIATION BETWEEN THE VARIOUS LEBANESE FACTIONS. THEY APPEAR CONFIDENT THAT THE PURELY LEBANESE ASPECTS OF THE CONFLICT ARE SUSCEPTIBLE TO SOLUTION. HERE AGAIN,
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SARKIS AND TO SOME EXTENT GEMAYAL ARE PREPARED TO OFFER MORE FAR-REACHING POLITICAL, SOCIAL AND ECONOMIC REFORMS OR CONCESSIONS THAN CHAMOUN AND FRANGIE.

-- THE CHRISTIANS ARE GRATEFUL FOR SYRIAN HELP. SARKIS SAID HE WAS DETERMINED TO WORK WITH THE SYRIANS FOR A PEACEFUL SETTLEMENT. SARKIS EXPLICITLY ASKED THAT THE U.S. DO EVERYTHING IT COULD TO HELP ENSURE THAT THERE WILL BE A CENTRAL AUTHORITY ON SEPTEMBER 23. WE PRESUME HE MEANT BY THIS A CEASEFIRE OR A SITUATION THAT WOULD PERMIT THE VARIOUS LEBANESE FACTIONS TO ACCEPT HIM AS THE PIVOT AROUND WHICH THE COUNTRY COULD BE REUNITED.

-- NONE OF THE CHRISTIAN LEADERS APPEARS TO ADVOCATE PARTITION. THERE IS, HOWEVER, SUPPORT FOR SOME FORM OF CANTONALIZATION WHICH WOULD ACCEPT THE EXISTING DE FACTO GEOGRAPHICAL DIVISION INsofar AS IT RELATES TO THE DISPOSITION OF MILITARY AND SECURITY FORCES ALONG CONFESSIONAL

LINES. EVEN THOSE LEADERS COMPLETELY DEDICATED TO THE CONCEPT OF A REUNIFIED LEBANON EXPECT THERE WILL BE A SUBSTANTIAL DEGREE OF REGIONAL AUTONOMY IN AT LEAST THE TRANSITIONAL PHASE.

-- IT IS AN ACCEPTED FACT AMONG ALL THAT SARKIS WILL TAKE OVER AS PRESIDENT ON SEPTEMBER 23.

-- THE CHRISTIAN LEADERS GENERALLY ARE CONCERNED ABOUT THE SUPPORT IN MATERIAL AND MEN BEING SUPPLIED FROM ABROAD, FROM THE SOVIETS, IRAQ AND LIBYA.

---SOME OF THE CHRISITIAN LEADERS ASKED FOR MILITARY EQUIPMENT, AND WE EXPLAINED OUR POSITION THAT WE WILL CONTINUE OUR POLICY OF NOT SUPPLYING WEAPONS TO EITHER SIDE, NOR PERMITTING COMMERCIAL SALES, BUT THAT THE U.S. WILL BE PREPARED TO PLAY ITS PART IN HELPING EQUIP A NATIONAL FORCE AFTER THE CONFLICT IS CONCLUDED.

-- OUR ENVOYS MADE CLEAR THAT WE CONTINUED TO SUPPORT A SOLUTION THAT WOULD PRESERVE THE TERRITORIAL INTEGRITY, INDEPENDENCE, NATIONAL UNITY AND COHESION OF LEBANON. WE
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SAID THAT WE WERE PREPARED TO SUPPORT EFFORTS TO SEEK A NEGOTIATED SETTLEMENT ON THE BASIS OF THE JANUARY-FEBRUARY PRINCIPLES AND WITH A RESTRICTED ROLE FOR THE PALESTINIANS. WE SAID WE HAD CONSISTENTLY SUPPORTED SYRIAN EFFORTS TO BRING ABOUT A POLITICAL SOLUTION, AND WE WOULD BE WILLING TO BACK MOVES IN LEBANON TO BRING THE FIGHTING TO AN END AND NEGOTIATE A SETTLEMENT.

-- WE TOLD THE CHRISTIANS THAT WE WOULD BE PREPARED TO SEND BACK FROM TIME TO TIME REPRESENTATIVES TO TALK TO THE CHRISTIAN LEADERS UNTIL SUCH TIME AS SECURITY CONDITIONS MADE IT POSSIBLE FOR OUR EMBASSY IN WEST BEIRUT TO RE-ESTABLISH NORMAL CONTACTS. WE TOLD SARKIS THAT WE WOULD BE PLEASED TO RECEIVE IN WASHINGTON A PERSONAL ENVOY FROM HIM AS SOON AS POSSIBLE AFTER HIS INAUGURATION.

3. AFTER GOING OVER THE FOREGOING POINTS, YOU SHOULD SAY THAT WE WOULD WELCOME ASAD'S ASSESSMENT OF THE EVOLVING SITUATION AND ANY INDICATIONS HE MAY CARE TO GIVE AS REGARDS HIS OWN PLANS. YOU SHOULD EXPLAIN THAT WE ARE PREPARED TO BACK UP SARKIS WITH ALL APPROPRIATE MEASURES AFTER HE ASSUMES OFFICE AND HOPE HE WILL BE A FORCE FOR UNITY AND

POLITICAL ACCOMMODATION. WE ARE CONSIDERING MAKING A
STATEMENT ABOUT THE TIME OF SARKIS' INAUGURATION, AND WE
WOULD APPRECIATE ASAD'S SUGGESTIONS AS TO THE POSITIONS WE

MIGHT ADOPT AND PURSUE, BOTH IN ANY PUBLIC STATEMENT AND
IN OUR DIPLOMATIC ACTIVITIES GENERALLY.
KISSINGER UNQTE ROBINSON

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